Gallery Walks: Improving Student Engagement in Performance Tasks (continued)

Engaging students by providing choice

Our students had a great deal of choice in their learning. Teachers chose how many options they wanted to give their students and gradually increased the list of choices for each unit as the year progressed. Options included:
- video newscasts using green screens and props;
- coding projects with Scratch and Makey Makey;
- building hands-on models;
- designing artifacts that they then printed with 3D printers; and
- a "Choose Your Own Adventure" student-created option. Ideas included writing and performing a rap about their subject, designing a virtual world in Minecraft or Roblox, and interpretive dance!

<u>Healthy competition sparks creativity for students and learning for teachers.</u>

The gallery walks quickly became competitive amongst classes. As the Instructional Technology Coach, I was so happy to have students emailing me about what they were working on! Teachers were approaching me for help modeling and co-teaching as their students grappled with learning how to create 3D models, research their topics independently, and improve script writing for their video projects.

<u>There have been some obstacles, but it's all worth it.</u>

Our lead teacher, Edgar Jumper, has some advice for schools that want to get started with gallery walks. "You're going to make mistakes. Don't be afraid to take a step back and look at the whole picture to find out how to make it better. Everything can be improved." His team has been challenged by massive construction projects at our school. Classrooms are in separate portable buildings connected by a wooden deck known amongst staff as "the boardwalk".

It isn't just the weather that has literally "rained on the parade". Jumper and his team have had to keep the big picture in mind when faced with surprises. There were multiple instances when construction crews accidentally cut through fiber-optic lines that provide Internet to their portable classrooms. When students had creative ideas to improve video projects, Jumper and his team found creative ways to use the boardwalk space. Often you would find students using picnic table space for projects.

<u>Starting gallery walks with your students.</u>

If you're interested in gallery walks as a strategy, consider these easy ways to get started:
- Gallery walks don't have to include multiple classrooms. You can do them within your own classroom. A great place to start is to model Think Alouds with students to help them begin to look at their peers work critically.
- Gallery walks aren't only for performance tasks in Science and Social Studies. You can use gallery walks to engage students in writing projects and also with Math. Students can give peers feedback on interesting parts of stories they write, and even ask questions about interesting words they used. In Math, students can observe how other groups model concepts in Math with manipulatives or how they approach multi-step problems in a unique way.

However you choose to begin, I think you will be pleasantly surprised to see just how excited your students get. Most importantly, when students are engaged in their learning, they truly shine!

HOW DID THE GALLERY WALKS HELP YOU?

Here's what kids had to say:

"I first tried out Scratch. I liked it but then Emma introduced me to newscast, and I realised I loved newscast more. We also changed how we did the newscasts from seeing them in the gallery walk."

-SOPHIE, 5TH GRADE STUDENT

"Gallery walks change our own performance tasks by giving us ideas and making us more creative."

-EVAN, 5TH GRADE STUDENT

"Well, I started becoming partners with my BFF, Kayla. We did interviews with costumes. Then, I did choose your own adventure for my last performance task and instead of Minecraft, I did Roblox. Also, I did a 3D print which I thought I would never do, but then I saw some and wanted to do it. All these performance tasks have let me do more things with my creativity."

-HALEY, 5TH GRADE STUDENT